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The purpose of Out In The Mountains [OITM] is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

#### Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material that broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of Out In The Mountains. This paper, as a non-profit organization, cannot and will not endorse any political candidates. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic.

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## editorial

# We Win! (For Now...)

**T**hanks to serious and extensive grassroots organizing by MassEquality and other pro-marriage equality groups, the Massachusetts legislature, sitting as a Constitutional Convention on September 14, defeated a proposed constitutional amendment that would have banned same-sex marriage while providing

civil unions. The vote was 157-39.

That was the same measure that had passed last year's ConCon by a vote of 105 to 92. If it had passed this round of voting, the proposed amendment would have appeared on ballots in the November 2006 election.

Here's the wonky stuff. MassEquality, a

coalition of pro-marriage equality groups, helped build the prevailing majority in part by working hard during last November's elections: all of the legislators facing contests who opposed the amendment last time were re-elected, sometimes by substantial margins; and of the 18 newly elected legislators voting on the issue for the first time, 16 voted against the marriage ban.

And while 42 of those voting to defeat the amendment did so because they opposed its provision of civil unions, 115 members of the majority were voting for equality, or at least against writing discrimination into our neighbor-state's constitution.

The struggle wasn't cheap and it isn't over. By its own estimate, MassEquality alone spent \$700,000 to support its legislative allies and to help pro-equality candidates get elected. Hundreds of marriage-equality volunteers went door-to-door, held fundraisers, and stuffed envelopes for candidates to achieve those victories. Activists connected legislators with newlywed gay and lesbian couples who would talk about what their marriages meant to them. Same-sex marriage stopped being about 'those people' and started being about 'my constituents' and 'my neighbors.'

Organizations from across the state

— including labor, religious groups, ethnic associations, professional associations, healthcare providers, and political groups — became allies and affiliates who spoke out publicly in favor of marriage equality. They mobilized their own volunteers to contact legislators and to hand out fliers and speak to people at every imaginable public venue.

And on September 14, all that work resulted in a vote for equality and against bigotry.

Being right is not enough, though it ought to be.

There is still the specter of a citizens' petition effort, which would ban same-sex marriage, period. If the anti-gay forces succeed in getting the

required number of valid signatures, and then convince 25 percent of the legislature (just 50 representatives and senators) to vote for it, the measure would appear on the ballot in 2008.

And from now until then, several thousand lesbian and gay couples will get married — not joined in civil union, but *married* — and the sky will not fall, the divorce rate will not surge, life will go on, children will go to school ...

Here in Vermont, we applaud the Massachusetts legislator-delegates who stood for marriage equality. And we wonder when we will get it here at home.

Last month, a legislator I would consider an ally contacted me at home via email. She asked whether I knew of any couples who would participate in a press conference with supportive legislators to urge the federal government to extend marriage benefits to couples with civil unions.

That's one solution. But I'm practical enough not to hold my breath waiting for it to happen. Personally I think all non-religious unions — regardless of the gender of the partners — should be civil unions. I like that my civil union is not a marriage and doesn't carry all that emotional and historical baggage.

What I don't like is that my spouse

pays taxes to the federal government for the health insurance benefit that covers me. I don't like that we have to figure our federal taxes twice in order to pay our state taxes — and give our worksheets to the state — when straight couples don't. I don't like that if one of us ends up in a hospital outside Vermont, the other one might not be included in decisions about care or even allowed in the room. And if one of us in an out-of-state hospital dies, the other one might not be allowed to claim the other's body for cremation or burial. I don't like that if she dies before I do, I have no access to her social security survivor benefits, which will be higher than mine.

So, although I agreed with the legislator, at first I wondered what realistic political goal such a press conference would serve. Is it to head off a coming push for marriage equality in Vermont? Is it a solid show of support or one without substance?

The legislator assured me the letter that would be written to Congress and the press conference that would be held to publicize it are entirely sincere. The idea has been floating since June, but was overtaken by the end-of-session rush, healthcare, summer study committees, and so on. If the goal is equal rights, the more avenues we take toward getting there, the better chances we have of getting those rights. And if nothing else, such a letter would publicize why civil unions are separate and unequal.

But whether you believe in marriage as an institution, or civil unions are just fine, it seems clear that achieving marriage equality carries a symbolic weight that could tip the balance away from hate and fear. And without the term "marriage," we don't even get a seat in the courtroom to argue for our own equality. ▼

Euan Bear